

Understanding Your Wireless Phone Bill

FCC Consumer Facts

Soon your wireless phone bills should be easier to read and understand. The FCC has issued new rules requiring wireless phone bills to be clearer - much like the rules the FCC issued previously for wireline (the phone system that operates using wires) phone bills.

The rules will require, among other things, that wireless bills use plain, non-misleading language and labels; contain full, non-deceptive descriptions of charges; and provide toll-free numbers for consumers to call if they have complaints or questions.

Background

In 1999, the FCC issued rules to make telephone bills easier to understand. These rules – the “truth-in-billing” rules – didn’t fully extend to wireless services and bills at the time. As wireless services have become increasingly popular and competitive, with many different plan choices available, consumers have complained to the FCC that it is increasingly more difficult to understand their wireless phone bills and comparison shop. So, now, the FCC has extended the truth-in-billing rules to include wireless phone bills as well.

The Truth-In-Billing Rules

The wireless truth-in-billing rules lay out a number of requirements. Specifically, your wireless phone bill must:

- Be accompanied by a brief, clear, non-misleading, plain language description of the service or services provided;

- Clearly identify the service provider associated with each charge;
- Descriptions of discretionary line item charges cannot in any manner suggest that they are taxes or government mandated or required charges;
- Provide a toll-free number for customers to call in order to lodge a complaint or obtain information.

In addition, wireless providers must use standard labels when referring to line item charges that relate to federal regulatory action, such as universal service fees, subscriber line, and local number portability charges. And, finally, any line item or surcharge that claims to recoup a specific government or regulatory program fee, such as the universal service fee, must not exceed the amount authorized by the government to be collected for that program.

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Review Your Phone Bill Carefully

Carefully review your wireless telephone bill every month.

- Treat your wireless telephone service just like any other major consumer purchase. You should review your monthly wireless telephone bills just as closely as you review your monthly credit card and bank statements.
- Keep in mind that you may sometimes be billed for a call you placed or a service you used – but the description listed on your telephone bill for the call or service may be unclear. If you don't know what service was provided for a charge listed on your bill, ask the company that billed the charge to explain the service before paying the bill.
- Keep a record of the wireless telephone services you have authorized and used. These records can be helpful when billing descriptions are unclear.
- Carefully read all forms and promotional materials – including all of the fine print – before signing up for wireless telephone services.
- Companies compete for your wireless telephone business. Use your buying power wisely and shop around.
- If you think that a company's charges are too high or that its services do not meet your needs, contact other wireless service providers and try to get a better deal – just be sure to ask about termination or any other charges before switching providers.

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Filing a Complaint

You may file a complaint with the FCC by e-mail (fccinfo@fcc.gov); the Internet (www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html); telephone 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice; or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; or mail:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaint Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Include the following in your complaint:

- your name, address and the wireless telephone number or numbers involved with your complaint;
- a telephone number where you can be reached during the business day;
- specific information about your complaint that describes the dispute in detail, including the names of **all** companies involved;
- names and telephone numbers of any company representatives that you contacted, the dates you spoke with these representatives and any other information that would help process your complaint;
- a **copy** of any bill(s) which relate to the dispute; and
- the type of resolution you are seeking, such as a credit or refund or a clearer explanation of the charge(s).

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For More Information

For more information about other telecommunications-related subjects, please visit the FCC's Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb.

In addition, you can contact the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at
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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html.

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